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Rights activists stress need to organize Civil liberties under attack

By BEN BEDELL

When it comes to civil liberties, the right wing's campaign "to get the government out of our lives" stops dead.

In a broad range of areas, the Reagan administration and Congress will attempt to erode civil liberties protections. From congressional legislation, to riders to appropriations bills, to investigative "anti-subversive" committees in the House and Senate, to the issuance of executive orders, a wide range of tactics is available to the right to harass and limit the freedoms of its opponents. What will be in store?

A survey of leading civil liberties organizations, as well as key conservative congressional representatives, indicates that the right will seek rollbacks over the next two years.

At the same time, civil libertarians point out that with few notable exceptions, the rollbacks can be stopped or sharply curtailed by vigorous organizing by progressive forces.

"There aren't going to be any advances," says Esther Herst of the National Committee Against Repressive Legislation (NCARL), "but if we can organize well enough, I don't think there will be any grave setbacks either."

There are expected to be at least a half dozen civil liberties issues coming up in the near future in the capital. If the political climate in the country moves further to the right, there

may well be more.

The pattern of erosion of civil liberties began well before the Nov. 4 election and coincided with the shift to the right of the entire ruling class, Democrat and Republican alike. The last Congress and the Carter administration, for example, were united on the need to remove certain restrictions on the intelligence agencies and to stiffen penalties for actions harmful to "national security."

The civil libertarians were on the defensive, and that trend is expected to accelerate under Reagan and the 97th Congress.

Fortunately, it will be next to impossible for conservatives to implement their maximum program under present circumstances. That program was set out most thoroughly in the report to Reagan by the Heritage Foundation, the ultra-right think tank.

The report proposes: a loyalty oath for all federal employees; congressional investigations of "subversive" groups; removal of all restrictions on FBI and CIA investigations of subversive groups, including warrantless wiretaps, mail covers, informants and illegal entries; FBI and CIA exclusion from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); centralized files of subversives; and a new agency solely for the purpose of covert intervention abroad.

The report adopts the broadest possible definition of "subversives" and even includes a list of organizations. Such "radical and New Left groups" as Tom

Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy and the Institute for Policy Studies are on it, along with antiwar and antinuclear lobbies. In addition, the report advocates that anyone "who engages in subversive activities without being fully aware of their purposes" should be targeted.

Few civil liberties activists expect this maximum program to be passed. "It's just too heavy handed in the present climate," says Alan Adler of the Center for National Security Studies. However, elements of it may be introduced in Congress.

Two bills have already been introduced that are likely to be the cutting edge of civil liberties erosion, and they may be followed by five other initiatives. These are:

- The Intelligence Identification and Protection Act. Passed by the House in the last session, it failed to become law only because of procedural problems in the final hours of the 96th Congress. The bill forbids anyone from disclosing information leading to the identification of a U.S. intelligence agent. Known as the "Agee bill," it would outlaw books like former CIA agent Philip Agee's "Inside the Company" and the work of groups that seek to expose CIA covert action.

- Exemption of the CIA and FBI from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Both the new attorney general, William French Smith, and the new CIA director, William Casey, said in confirmation hearings that

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